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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 KHARTOUM 001792

DEPT FOR AF A/S FRAZER, SE WILLIAMSON, AF/SPG, PRM
NSC FOR PITTMAN AND HUDSON
DEPT PLS PASS USAID FOR AFR/SUDAN
ADDIS ABABA ALSO FOR USAU

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: GOSS VIEWS ON ABYEI VIOLENCE, CONCERNS OF SPILLOVER ALONG
NORTH-SOUTH BORDER

REFS: A. Khartoum 1786

[1](#)B. Khartoum 1718

[1](#)C. Khartoum 1767

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: During a December 13 meeting with the Juba diplomatic corps, select Abyei Commissioners and GOSS Ministers placed responsibility for the December 12 gun battle in Abyei town (ref. A) on the Government of National Unity's (GNU) rejection of international assistance for the Abyei Joint Integrated Unit (JIU) and on Khartoum's own failure to fund the SAF JIU contingent. Although forces are now separated, GOSS, Abyei, and UNMIS officials expressed concern about possible SAF retaliation. UNMIS is reviewing Sector Six tripwires in addition to contingency planning for renewed violence in both Abyei and along the North/South border.
END SUMMARY.

DESPITE TENSIONS IN ABYEI, SAF REJECTS CALL FOR JDB

[1](#)2. (SBU) On December 13, Abyei Chief Administrator Arop Mayok joined UNMIS SRSG Ashraf Qazi, the Force Commander, and Southern Sector Resident Coordinator David Gressly in Abyei in response to concerns by UN Abyei staff about the likelihood of imminent escalation. Both Benjamin and Deng similarly noted the GOSS remains "gravely concerned" about potential retaliation following the death of two SAF soldiers December 12. SPLA Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations MG James Hoth told CG Juba on December 13 that SAF counterparts are resisting SPLA Chief of Staff Oyai Deng Ajak's call for an immediate session of the Joint Defense Board. SAF leadership argued that it would be inappropriate to meet while National JIU Commander Thomas Cirillo remained outside of Sudan.

GOSS BLAMES FIREFIGHT ON ROADMAP FAILURE

[1](#)3. (SBU) That same morning, Abyei Agriculture Commissioner Kuol Arop, GOSS Minister for Presidential Affairs Luka Biong Deng, GOSS Minister for Regional Cooperation Barnabas Marial Benjamin, and GOSS Minister for Gender and Social Welfare Mary Kiden met with Juba's diplomatic corps to seek additional funding for the Abyei region following the GNU's decision to allot less than \$1 million to the region in its 2009 national budget: 500,000 SDG for Abyei's executive branch and 600,000 SDG for its legislative structures. (NOTE: Both the GNU and the GoSS face sharp declines in oil revenues (ref B). Transfers to states and to the GoSS are to fall 14 percent under the GNU's 2009 budget. The GOSS, citing falling oil prices, will not be able to budget any funds for Abyei in its 2009 budget. However, the larger issue is the GNU's delay in disbursing any significant amount of the substantial oil revenues which have been set aside for the Abyei Administration under the Roadmap Agreement. The GNU claims this is because the Interim

Administration does not yet have financial mechanisms in place; this issue must be resolved immediately between the GNU and the Abyei Interim Administration and the Embassy will continue to push for this to happen. END NOTE).

14. (SBU) Agricultural Commissioner Arop charged that the December 12 Abyei incident was triggered by "SAF 31st Brigade entrepreneurs" unhappy with the Abyei Administration's decision to relocate the town market, and by Khartoum's discomfort with the continued integration of Misseriya militias into the SPLA. (NOTE: Arop contends the recent decision to move six SAF brigades into South Kordofan was an attempt to intimidate Misseriya SPLA recruits, though the GOS contends it is necessary to secure oil areas from JEM attacks. END NOTE.) The Abyei Administration, in collaboration with UNDP, has seized upon the May 2008 destruction of Abyei town to initiate broad-based urban planning within the town and its peripheral urban areas as a means to speed both economic growth and IDP returns, while also limiting future tensions between townspeople and transiting Misseriya pastoralists. Arop contends that much of the current "regenerated market" in Abyei town is organized around SAF 31st Brigade soldiers who shed their SAF uniforms shortly after the May violence and established businesses on the remains of the market area. (COMMENT: In other areas along the 1956 border, the SPLA has accused such "SAF traders" of being SAF infiltrators waiting to reactivate in case of renewed conflict between SAF/SPA. END COMMENT.)

15. (SBU) According to both Arop and Minister for Presidential Affairs Luka Biong Deng, on December 12 one SAF officer became "belligerent" while Abyei officials spoke with traders about the need to relocate the market. At that time, Abyei officials brought in an SPLA JIU officer into the argument who ordered the SAF soldier

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to report to "local Abyei police." According to Deng, the SAF soldier then became "problematic" for the police, and ran from a physical altercation back to the SAF JIU barracks. He returned with a contingent of JIU SAF soldiers on whom scared police opened fire, at which point the SAF returned fire. Two SAF were killed and five wounded, with two police and two civilians also injured during the battle.

16. (SBU) GoSS Minister for Regional Cooperation Barnabas Marial Benjamin and Presidential Affairs Minister Biong Deng both argued that this latest incident is not a reflection of issues between Abyei residents, but rather is rooted in frustration due to Khartoum's failure to implement the Abyei Roadmap. "If the Joint Integrated Units were appropriately catered to by the Government of National Unity we would not have seen violence yesterday," Biong Deng asserted. "We continue to supply the SPLA JIU contingent with direct assistance through the SPLA, despite the fact this is a duty of the national government in Khartoum. They maintain it is a question of funding priorities, yet continue to reject offers of assistance from the like of Norway and the United Kingdom."

17. (SBU) Local officials continue to make progress despite a lack of assistance from Khartoum, they said. The December 5 meeting between Ngok Dinka and Misseriya traditional leaders (ref. C) culminated in the group's joint condemnation of the May violence and subsequent looting in Abyei, in addition to agreement that Misseriya pastoralists would travel into Abyei region unarmed. (NOTE: For the purposes of this latest agreement the region is defined as the totality of the ceasefire zone, including Former Western Kordofan -- an area not included in the Abyei Roadmap, but included in the CPA's Abyei Protocol. UNMIS notes that SAF continues to refuse to permit UNMIS to patrol north of the Abyei Roadmap area (which is a reduction of the area delineated by the Comprehensive Peace Agreement) and so UNMIS' ability to monitor Misseriya commitment to this agreement is constrained. END NOTE).

PROGRESS IN ABYEI MOVES FLASH-POINTS ELSEWHERE

18. (SBU) Deng fears that Khartoum's unhappiness with reconciliation at the Abyei local level will lead it to use Misseriya elsewhere

along the 1956 North/South border to a "trigger a situation" that would provoke direct SAF/SPLA confrontation. UNMIS Civil Affairs Acting Head Diane De Guzman endorsed this concern, noting a recent decision by SPLA to pull back from Abiennmon County in Unity State rather than risk confrontation with Misseriya groups that allegedly had recently been visited by NISS ersonnel assigned to the Unity oil fields. Regional Cooperation Minister Benjamin also underscored Deng's point, saying that he had just left a meeting of the Southern Sudan Defense Council focused on the early-morning December 13 arrival of 3,000 armed Misseriya in Northern Bahr el Ghazal (NGEG) north of the state capital of Aweil. Minister Benjamin reported that this group is equipped with gun-mounted vehicles, heavy and light weapons, and wear military uniforms. According to Benjamin, the GOSS received reports of limited attacks on the (recently disarmed) civilian population and initial displacements, and that while the Area Joint Military Committee was set to convene shortly, "it is important that we have immediate international engagement on the issue because, while we are already reaching out to the NCP, we believe they will attempt to downplay the situation as usual." Commissioner Arop opined that Khartoum may have encouraged early Misseriya migration to NBEG in an attempt to undermine the agreement to transit the Abyei region unarmed. (NOTE: Others we have talked to, including Abyei Commissioner Mayok (ref. C), blame the early migration on the early end of the rainy season. END NOTE.)

¶9. (SBU) UNMIS military observers (protect) assigned to Aweil told Acting CG on December 13 that reports of "armed Misseriya in uniform" are credible, and that the AJMC would be meeting "shortly" despite protests from SAF representatives that nomad migrations are outside of its mandate. UN humanitarian agencies are assessing displacement levels, but are confident that contingency plans for natural disasters would allow for rapid and appropriate rollout of support to affected civilian populations, assuming the situation remains restive.

¶10. (SBU) Acting CG met with SPLA D/COS (Operations) James Hoth to ascertain what measures the SPLA would take to protect civilian populations given the recent civilian disarmament in the area. Hoth allowed that discussion with SPLA CoS MG Oyai Deng Ajak are still ongoing, but that GOSS President Salva Kiir Mayardit already had ordered the SPLA to exercise maximum restraint until a Joint Defense Board meeting could be convened.

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COMMENT
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¶11. (SBU) The December 12 incident shows clearly that Abyei remains a dangerous flashpoint and underscores the urgent need for credible implementation of the Roadmap. In order to obstruct Dinka-Misseriya reconciliation, the NCP continues to hobble the capacity of the new Administration: withholding revenues (now estimated to be at least \$20 million) to which the Administration is entitled under the Roadmap, thwarting offers from Norway and the UK to assist the Abyei JIU, and refusing to allow UNMIS to monitor all of Southern Kordofan state as stipulated in the CPA. While we are skeptical of GoSS suspicions that Khartoum wants to provoke a major incident that could lead back to war at this time, that the GoSS harbors such serious concerns shows just how tense the situation is and the limits of President Kiir's ability to restrain increasingly dissatisfied front-line SPLA. The greater danger is that even a minor incident in Abyei could quickly draw nearby SAF and SPLA units into a general melee, as happened in May. Embassy Khartoum will continue to urge restraint and will push the GNU to disburse funds to the Abyei Interim Administration immediately.

ASQUINO